

# Many Siouxland towns seek Great Places status

By Bret Hayworth  
Journal staff writer

One hundred forty-five cities, counties, historic areas and corridors have put forth invitations to be named one of three pilot Great Places in Iowa.

A new-style government combination will put the power of 18 state agencies together to tout some of the most distinctive places in Iowa. July 1 marked the cutoff for applications — technically called “invitations” in the Great Places nomenclature — and the state released all the invitations Wednesday.

The Great Places hopefuls are a widely mixed bag, from the Creative Corridor of Cedar Rapids, Coralville and Iowa City to the Creative Economy Theme Park in Fairfield to the Historical



Walker

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs Anita Walker, who is heading the endeavor. “Iowans clearly accepted the challenge to think about what was genuine and authentic about their places.”

Gov. Tom Vilsack announced the Great Places initiative in his 2005 Condition of the State address. He challenged state agencies and Iowans to be bold and creative in turning neighborhoods, towns and regions into even better places.

State employee “coaches” will work with the 145 entities to get their offers ready. By Oct. 1, a citizen advisory board appointed by Vilsack will select the three pilot places. The board will consider criteria like a unique sense of place, engaging experiences, rich social fabric, vital economy, pleasing environment and creative culture.

Walker said projects with broad community support, rather than “just the Chamber (of commerce) and city administrator” support would likely fare better.

Hills Corridor in Southwest Iowa (covering nine counties) to the Iowa State University Greek Community in Ames.

There are six entities alone from Council Bluffs seeking to be named Great Places. Most major cities have at least one entry — Sioux City has two — and one of the smallest towns entering is Whiting.

Other Northwest Iowa entities having put forth Great Places invitations are Cherokee County, Denison, downtown Sioux Center, Sioux Center’s Heritage Village, Greater Estherville area, Great Waters and Great Prairies of Clay and Dickinson Counties, Lake View, the Loess Hills, Ida Grove, O’Brien County, Sanborn, Spirit Lake and Storm Lake. The Sioux City entries include one for the downtown entry area and another for the Floyd Boulevard Local Food Market Square.

“The number and the quality of the invitations we received show the tremendous enthusiasm for Great Places,” said

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# A sampling of Great Places invitations/applications

A sampling of the 145 invitations from Iowa entities seeking to be named a Great Place, thereby gaining the aid of 18 state agencies:

■ **Sioux City's Floyd Boulevard Local Food Market:** "We must create a place where everyone can learn what it means for your food to be local, sustainable and humanely raised." The market is called "a place where the ethics of humane, home-grown and healthy food coalesce with an earnest determination to assist in the lives of local farmers... On the scale of readiness, we have a long way to go. We sit at the fulcrum, the precipice of great success and we invite you to be a potential partner."

■ **Entry to Sioux City, downtown and river-front area:** "The Entry is located in the geographic center of our community and is the gateway to the state of Iowa from neighboring Nebraska and South Dakota. Located along the Missouri River, bordering the historic and progressive downtown area, the Entry was one of the key historical locations in the nation's westward expansion, and remains to this day the cultural, entertainment, transportation and economic core of the region."

■ **Storm Lake:** "Storm Lake is also unique in that we have accepted the need to embrace change in order to grow and become a more regional destination. This acceptance of change is evident in the way the community has embraced the arrival of minority populations and new cultures, the way the community has stood up for and been a force for change in taking charge of our future and embarking

on a project that stands to change the future of this region for generations to come, Project Awaysis." Awaysis is a \$30-million project for lake-related quality-of-life improvements.

■ **Great Waters and Great Prairies of Clay and Dickinson Counties:** "The Clay and Dickinson County areas exist in harmony and have a natural relationship. With more prairie and natural water areas than any other counties in Iowa, glacial lakes and undisturbed river banks, and arts/culture and historical preservation, Clay and Dickinson Counties are truly unique and authentic."

■ **Loess Hills:** "The Loess Hills are an American Treasure. This unique landform ranges from one to 15 miles wide and is approximately 200 miles long, encompassing almost 650,000 acres. The Loess Hills have unique geology, biology, archeology, natural and scenic resources and cultural resources."

■ **Greater Estherville:** "The Greater Estherville Area is continually working to evolve from what we were in the past to what we are presently, and what we strive to be in the future. In the 1800s, we were a booming railroad town; in the 1900s, a thriving meatpacking town. Today, Estherville cannot be described with two words. Today we are a patchwork quilt of diversity, opportunity and culture."

■ **Ida Grove:** "Our vision for the Moorehead Park/Ida Grove is simply to make it more accessible and user friendly to visitors. By tying the park and city together, visitors will get the best of what both have to offer."

— Bret Hayworth